

Washington, DC – As health reports forecast the global eradication of polio is possible during President Obama's term in office, Congresswoman Betty McCollum (MN-4) organized 21 Members of Congress to co-author a bipartisan letter urging the Obama Administration to reaffirm America's financial and political commitment to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative.

"Our nation has made huge progress in battling Polio and now we are on the verge of its eradication. America has been a leader in this fight and we must prioritize our commitment to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative to ensure the millions of children at risk around the world will get life saving vaccines," Congresswoman McCollum said.

Global outcomes have significantly improved as a result of the initiative. The number of polio cases has fallen from an estimated 350,000 in 1988 to 1,300 in 2007 – a more than 99% decline in reported cases. Two billion children have been immunized, five million spared disability and over 250,000 deaths have been averted from polio.

The eradication program is one of the largest, most successful public-private health initiatives ever undertaken. The U.S. is the leading public sector donor, with contributions to date totaling nearly \$1.5 billion. Over \$6 billion has already been invested globally. Global health experts tout that the Global Polio Eradication Initiative is an effective model for more complex health initiatives. Once eradicated, polio would only be the second disease, next to smallpox, to ever reach this status.

The letter, which was sent to the White House today, states, “We respectfully request you to continue the United States’ leadership by highlighting polio eradication among your international public health priorities, maintaining the United States’ investment in polio eradication in the Federal budget, and by urging the leaders in the remaining polio endemic countries of Afghanistan, India, Nigeria and Pakistan, to intensify their efforts to achieve polio eradication.”

Congresswoman Betty McCollum (MN-4) serves on the House Appropriations & Budget Committees.

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